



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702

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PROPOSED RULE PUBLISHED FOR A TRAP LIMITATION PROGRAM FOR THE STONE CRAB FISHERY IN FEDERAL WATERS OFF WEST FLORIDA

National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) announces that it has published a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* (67 FR 42744, June 25, 2002) for Amendment 7 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Stone Crab Fishery of the Gulf of Mexico (FMP). Proposals in Amendment 7 would establish a Federal trap limitation program for the commercial stone crab fishery in the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) off Florida's west coast, including Monroe County. This proposed Federal program would complement the stone crab trap limitation program recently implemented by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FFWCC). The proposals would enhance the effectiveness of the FFWCC program and, thereby, help to reduce overcapitalization in the stone crab fishery.

Written comments on this proposed rule must be received no later than 4:30 p.m., eastern daylight savings time, on August 9, 2002. Please send written comments to Mark Godcharles, NMFS, Southeast Regional Office, 9721 Executive Center Drive N., St. Petersburg, FL 33702. Comments also may be sent via fax to 727-570-5583. No comments submitted via e-mail or Internet will be accepted, nor will written comments received after close of business August 9, 2002.

If approved, implementation of this proposed Federal program would coincide with the planned implementation of the FFWCC program, i.e., October 1, 2002. Amendment 7 was developed by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council). Copies of Amendment 7 may be requested from the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, 3018 U.S. Highway 301 North, Suite 1000, Tampa, Florida 33619-2266; phone: 813-228-2815; fax: 813-225-7015; e-mail: gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org. Copies of the proposed rule may be requested from Mark

Godcharles or viewed at the following Web site:
<http://frwebgate3.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/waisgate.cgi?WAISdocID=2779181924+6+0+0&W AISaction=retrieve>.

In Amendment 7, the Gulf Council has proposed the following nine changes to the FMP to align Federal management of the stone crab fishery with the FFWCC trap reduction program:

- (1) Recognize, but not require, Florida's stone crab licenses and trap tags for vessels operating in the Federal management area.
- (2) Establish a Federal program to issue non-transferable (to other persons) vessel permits, trap certificates, and trap tags for EEZ use only.
- (3) Provide opportunity to apply for the proposed Federal vessel permit to those who could meet the qualifying criteria but could not or chose not to obtain the stone crab vessel license or tags issued by the FFWCC.
- (4) Allow applicants up to 90 days following the effective date of the final rule implementing Amendment 7 to apply for Federal permits and tags.
- (5) Determine the number of Federal trap tags to be issued to qualifying persons by dividing his/her highest seasonal landings of stone crab claws during one of three fishing seasons (1995/96, 1996/97, or 1997/98) by 5 lbs.
- (6) Charge a fee for the issuance of Federal trap tags and vessel permits and their annual renewals.
- (7) Establish a Federal appeals process for those denied a Federal permit.
- (8) Revise the Protocol (i.e., FMP Protocol and Procedure for an Enhanced Cooperative Management System) to reflect revisions to Florida's Constitution.

- (9) Replace FMP management objective 3 with a new objective: Take regulatory action to increase catch per unit effort and reduce overcapitalization in terms of gear deployed in the fishery.

This and other *Southeast Fishery Bulletins* are available on the SERO Web homepage (<http://caldera.sero.nmfs.gov>). Additional information on southeastern fisheries is available from the Gulf Council. The Web site and e-mail addresses for the Gulf of Mexico Council are **<http://www.gulfcouncil.org>** and

gulfcouncil@gulfcouncil.org, respectively.

To obtain considerable recorded information about our missions, services, and management measures, call our public service line at 1-866-570-5301. If the information that you need is not available on that line, you can leave a message and we'll get back to you within one business day.

NOAA Fisheries is an agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.